

Dean Veall interviews Alfredo Cramerotti for YMAG Newsletter of the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries in Wales.

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The Federation is a body representing museums and art galleries in Wales with membership including Arts Council, National Museum of Wales, National Trust and most local authority museums in Wales.

DV - What attracted you to Mostyn? With such a pan European education and experience as curator, artist, educator, writer in a range of organisations what attracted you to the Welsh visual art scene?

AC – I would say three main reasons in particular - equally important:

1. The building, the architecture, the art space itself. I fell in love with the building the first time I stepped in, almost two years ago (soon after it was re-opened). It's such an atmospheric building, one of the most beautiful art spaces in the UK and possibly in Europe (and I know some). It's the combination of light, wood, concrete and shapes that makes you feel welcomed and 'in tune' with your surrounding - a rare feat in artistic terms. My respect to Ellis Williams Architects for achieving that.
2. The career opportunity to run a crucial organisation of a nation, one of the most dynamic and well respected art institutions in the UK - partner of the prestigious Plus Tate network and of the Artes Mundi International Art Award. Mostyn has a formidable reputation, nationally and internationally, and it was at a crucial stage of its history, ready to take that leap to another level of artistic quality, relevance and visibility.
3. The challenge that represents being 'at the periphery of the centre'; Mostyn is the flagship for contemporary art in Wales, and for Welsh art abroad, and you have to work

hard to be socially, culturally, politically and geographically relevant, with the local context and abroad; nothing is to be taken for granted. That's precisely the point of working in art - when you have to be relevant for someone's life in order to win hearts and minds of your audience. I think we are at a good point re this, but there are also many more things, approaches and initiatives that we want to do.

DV - Mostyn has just been through an important stage in its history, culminating in the opening of the RIBA award winning renovation. With new partnerships announced with Artes Mundi and Tate Plus recently, as its newest director what is your vision for the gallery?

AC - Mostyn is here to open up so many dialogues about contemporary life, our life here and now, through contemporary art. That is the vision of Mostyn, and the ground to sustain an art institution. It is a different function that a TV programme, a book or a sport event - art and cultural production is what differentiates humans from other animals, and it is an opportunity to make sense of what is 'out there' from a different perspective than watching news or going to service. It is neither better or worse, it helps understand all the other 'systems' that govern, administrate or regulate our life (for the good and bad), it is a complementary - yet crucial - part of what we do and who we are. Mostyn reflects all this, and stands to be a relevant part of life in Wales.

DV - Much has been made of recently of the 'String of Pearls' along the south coast of England, new galleries showing contemporary art, such as Turner Contemporary in Margate and the Jerwood Gallery in Hastings. There are many similarities between these venues and Mostyn, their new architecture but importantly their seaside location. What role do you think Oriel Mostyn and these other galleries can play in the regeneration of Victorian seaside towns and why contemporary art over other heritage/culture?

AC - I am in favour of injecting culture and art into the regeneration schemes, because of the relevance and function of art in discussing social, cultural, political and geographical issues; I am not a curator who looks for the nice painting, but rather someone who is keen to engage with the work of an artist, and the dialogue with the space and the audience, precisely because there is something to say about where we live, how we live, what we want to be and to do. This is not to say I like 'ugly' things - I just question what is beautiful and what is ugly, and I consider the aesthetics of things as a powerful tool to 'unpack' life. Thus, if art can spark debate about economics, science, law or the employment rate in the country, that is art - and the institutions proposing that - worth engaging with, independently from the medium used and even of the original intention of the artist. And I know this can be read as controversial, but I do believe artists (and curators, and galleries) don't have the monopoly on the interpretation and the reading of the works - only the artworks themselves hold that, and are there to open up their supposed meaning, and the possible interpretation, to the audiences.

DV - Oriel Mostyn is the largest contemporary art gallery in Wales, contemporary art has a reputation of challenging visitors. How do you think contemporary art shown in galleries such as Oriel Mostyn can contribute to the Welsh Government's agenda on tackling the effects of poverty?

AC - Just consider this: even in an hypothetical post-atomic disaster scenario, after the first two weeks of scavenging for food and water, the survivors will start to engage in activities that little would have to do with bare surviving: recording stories, leaving traces, attempting to communicate, learning songs, bear witnessing - using any form of medium they could get their hands and minds on. This is exactly the power of art - and cultural production at large: the capability to understand the world and ourselves in a 'lateral thinking' (and doing) way. Poverty is obviously a big issue, as it is health and happiness: we need to tackle all the important aspects of our life from multiple angles - not only in economical terms, as life will never be fulfilled by money only; as it would

never be fulfilled by health only. Art and culture comes into the big picture by enriching people lives, making the possible probable, unlashng creativity and energy, sharing ideas, thoughts and skills for a better environment and living, creating opportunities often out of nothing: and that what sticks to us as important and relevant in the long terms, and that's also what transcends my and your individual existence and put our being in perspective.